

with fossil fuels. Secretary Abraham is completing his first year and he doesn't have his Assistant Secretary dealing with fossil fuels. We are now importing about 58 percent of our energy needs and he doesn't even have an Assistant Secretary dealing with fossil fuels.

One of the first bills we are going to be wrestling with next year is an energy bill. We have a commitment from the majority leader that we are going to take up energy early next year. That is great. You would think the administration would be entitled to have their Assistant Secretary to help the negotiations, to help prod Congress along. So I urge my colleagues to approve his nomination. He was reported out of the Energy Committee unanimously, as I believe Beverly Cook was, from Idaho, to be Assistant Secretary of Energy dealing with environment, safety, and health.

Also Margaret S.Y. Chu, of New Mexico, to be Director of the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, Department of Energy.

There is no reason why we cannot do most of these nominees. Most of these nominees passed by unanimous votes in the committees. Why can't we confirm these individuals?

I urge Senator DASCHLE and Senator REID and others to help.

There are a couple of others who are very important. The Department of State, John Hanford. John Hanford is an individual with whom many of us worked in the Senate for years. He worked for Senator LUGAR. He helped myself and others when we ended up passing the International Religious Freedom Act. Senator LIEBERMAN was a principal sponsor of that, and Senator SPECTER. The administration nominated John Hanford III, of Virginia, to be Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom. When you think of the battles we have going on all across the world with religious freedom, and some of it is in Afghanistan and some in Pakistan and some in Sudan where you have individuals who are held captive, imprisoned, enslaved because of their religion, wouldn't it make sense for us to get our Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom confirmed so he can go to work and help protect and promote religious harmony and freedom throughout the world? Hopefully, his nomination will be confirmed tonight.

We have several other people in the Department of State who were confirmed by the Foreign Relations Committee unanimously who should be confirmed tonight. Many of these were just reported by the committee, by Senator BIDEN. I thank him for doing that. I am looking at John Ong, who is to be Ambassador to Norway and John Price to be Ambassador Extraordinary to the Republic of Mauritius; Arthur

Dewey, of Maryland, to be Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees, and Migration.

Some of these, again, were just reported out. I thank my colleagues. We should be able to get those through as well, not to mention Gaddi Vasquez, of California, to be Director of the Peace Corps.

I mention these. These are not all. I did not mention Gene Scalia. I would really urge my colleagues—Gene Scalia has been on the calendar. He was nominated in, I believe, April, one of the earliest nominees of this administration, to be Solicitor of the Department of Labor. Secretary Chao is entitled to have a Solicitor. One of the most important positions in the Department of Labor is Solicitor. He has to make all kinds of rulings. It is very important that she have her Solicitor. I urge my colleagues, let's have a vote. If we cannot have it today, let's have it in January; let's vote up or down.

Somebody said we may have to file cloture. I can think of several people, including the previous Solicitor of Labor, to whom many on this side might have had a philosophical objection, but we did not require cloture. You should not require cloture on most nominees. You should not require cloture hardly ever on nominees unless they are really out of the Main Street. We had a vote on Joycelyn Elders and I opposed that nomination very significantly, but it was an up-or-down vote.

I think people are entitled to have a difference of opinion and have a debate. If we have a difference of opinion, let's discuss it. This is the Senate. But to not allow somebody to have a vote and hold their careers in limbo for an unlimited period of time, it is not fair to them, and I don't think it makes the Senate look very good.

Again, I urge our colleagues to move forward on Gene Scalia, to move forward on some of these other nominees, many of whom, I hope and expect to be confirmed tonight. I hope they will. I urge the leadership on the Democrat side to work with us and see if we cannot clear up as many nominees as possible, confirm as many nominees as possible on the Executive Calendar.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS

Mr. VOINOVICH. Mr. President, I rise to express my disappointment that the Senate did not have an opportunity today to vote on the White House and Senate Centrist Coalition compromise on the economic stimulus package to aid dislocated workers. I think the stimulus package, if passed, would have made a real difference for the American people. It would have helped individuals and families. It would have helped create jobs, or at least maintain

jobs. And it would have responded to the needs of laid-off workers and their families.

Early this fall, when it became clear to me that our nation was in recession, I decided to get actively involved in developing and advocating a stimulus package. I recognized the package that was coming out of the House could not get through the Senate because it wasn't balanced. So I gathered together with my other colleagues in the Centrist Coalition. Six of us from the Coalition were the ones who really were the nucleus of it—I was one of them with OLYMPIA SNOWE and SUSAN COLLINS, and on the Democrat side there was JOHN BREAU and two of my colleagues who were former Governors, ZELL MILLER, who was a former Governor of Georgia, and BEN NELSON, the former Governor of Nebraska.

We decided we would try to put something together that would be fair, and that would respond to the need to stimulate the economy, and at the same time, respond to the human needs that we see throughout this country. We wanted to try to work something out, and see if we could get something through Congress and particularly through the Senate.

We worked very conscientiously on that package. We finally were able to get the ear of the White House and got them to be part of this compromise package. Yesterday we were able to convince the leadership in the House of Representatives that it was a fair package, although a far cry from the package they had adopted. We had hoped that, somehow, miraculously, maybe, we would have had an opportunity to vote on that package in the Senate.

The Republican leader, Senator LOTT, talked about the fact that maybe during the period of time we are in recession, pressure will build up and maybe we will get a bill passed. Or maybe the pressure will not be out there and we will not need to pass a piece of legislation. However, I am here to tell you that this legislation is needed now.

This afternoon I met with about 50 steelworkers from Cleveland, OH, from LTV steel. That company is in bankruptcy. Their jobs are gone and they are displaced. They are petrified because they do not know how they are going to be able to take care of their medical costs. Their company had a health plan, but COBRA is no longer an option because the company is out of business. They are worried about how they are going to provide health care for their families. They will get their unemployment benefits, but they are really concerned about how to pay for their health care coverage.

I pointed out to them that the stimulus package the Centrist Coalition put together would subsidize their health care to the tune of 60 percent. They were pleased to learn that their was

hope that someone would help them, that they could get insurance for their families to get them over this very difficult period. I can tell you: they are frightened.

I think so often when we talk about stimulus packages, we get caught up in the dollar amounts and we don't talk about real people. That is what this is about. For example, the rebate program that is in our stimulus package would provide help to some 38 million low-income workers who didn't qualify for rebate checks the last time around. Those rebates would mean \$13.5 billion would go into the pockets of those individuals to help them with their problems. And I am sure it would help stimulate the economy because they would likely spend that money.

Some describe the reduction in marginal rates as an awful thing because of the fact that we would reduce the marginal rate from 27½ down to 25 percent. I would like to point out that we are talking about single people who make between \$28,000 and \$68,000, and married couples who make between \$47,000 and \$113,000. That is about one-third of the taxpayers in this country, some 36 million people, who would have benefitted if we had gone forward with these rate reductions. Between the 38 million beneficiaries of the rebate checks, and the 36 million who would benefit from the reduction in marginal rates, a total of 74 million Americans would have been able to take advantage of this package.

The thing I would really like to concentrate on is the part of this package that deals with health care. When we got started debating the stimulus package, the House passed a package that had something like \$3 billion for health care. Likewise, the President's package had also had \$3 billion. Our centrist package had \$13.5 billion. The Democratic Finance Committee proposal was \$16.7 billion. At the end of the day, the Centrist Coalition and White House compromise package had \$21 billion in it for dislocated workers' health care, money for the States for national emergency grants, including \$4 billion to the States for Medicaid funding.

Now I would like to talk about what we do for displaced workers.

First of all, we include an extension of 13 weeks of unemployment benefits—benefits that would be available to those who became unemployed between March 15, 2001, and December 31 at the end of next year. An estimated 3 million unemployed workers would qualify for benefits averaging about \$230 a week. Those extended benefits would be 100-percent federally funded at a cost of about \$10 billion to the Federal Government, so States wouldn't have to pick up the tab.

The bill would allow states to accelerate the transfer of \$9 billion from State unemployment trust funds so

they could distribute that money earlier than now possible. This transfer of money, which already belongs to the states, would help State treasuries, which are in dire straits today. This proposed advance would provide the States with the flexibility to pay administrative costs, provide additional benefits for part-time workers, adopt alternative base periods, and avoid raising their unemployment taxes during the current recessionary times.

Next, let us look at health care benefits.

The Centrist Coalition and White House compromise proposal includes \$19 billion in health care assistance for dislocated workers.

It provides a refundable, advanceable tax credit to all displaced workers, who are eligible for unemployment insurance, for the purchase of health insurance—not just individuals who are eligible for COBRA coverage.

Individuals with access to health insurance through a spouse wouldn't be eligible and couldn't get the credit.

However, the credit is available to unemployed people who do not have access to coverage through COBRA, since their employers did not provide health insurance or their employer went out of business. Under this bill, these individuals would have been able to get a 60-percent subsidy of their health insurance costs without any cap on the dollar amount of subsidy.

The proposal also includes reforms to ensure that people have access to health insurance coverage in the individual market. If a person has 12 months of employer-sponsored coverage, rather than 18 months as under the current law, health insurers are required to issue a policy and not impose any preexisting condition exclusion. In other words, if someone has a preexisting exclusion for which they would ordinarily be disqualified from getting health insurance, this reform requires that they be able to obtain health insurance.

The Centrist and White House proposal also includes \$4 billion in enhanced national emergency grants for the States which Governors could use to help all workers—not just those eligible for the tax credit. They could use this to pay for health insurance in both public and private plans. In other words, we would be paying \$4 billion out to the States so they can reach out and help people in their respective States who are not covered by some of the particular provisions in the stimulus package.

Last if not least, the centrist package provides a \$4.6 billion, one-time grant to assist states with their Medicaid programs.

I worked with the National Governors Association and the Bush administration to try to get them to understand that the State governments are not like the Federal Government.

States are in deep budgetary trouble because they have to balance their budgets every year. The money isn't there for them to take care of the many needs they face. This \$4.6 billion grant would have gone out to the States to help them provide Medicaid for the neediest of our brothers and sisters. In many States they are going to have to cut Medicaid payments because they simply don't have the money since their State treasuries are in such deep financial trouble.

I hope my colleagues understand that this is not some kind of a game. We are talking about real human beings.

This morning at a press conference, one of the reporters said to me: I understand the problem with this stimulus bill is that the majority leader has a problem with the philosophy of it.

I said that this bill responds to most of the concerns that have been raised by my colleagues from the other side of the aisle.

Think about it. When was the last time Congress gave serious consideration to providing health care to unemployed workers? I don't ever recall such consideration before. But this time, we have been able to get a Republican administration and a Republican House of Representatives to consider providing health insurance to unemployed workers. That was a breakthrough in terms of dealing with the unemployed and displaced workers in this country.

I happen to believe that if this proposal had come from the other side of the aisle and not from the centrist coalition and the White House, many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle would have been very much in favor of this proposal.

I am hoping, as we all go home and look into the eyes of the people who will come and see us because they have lost their jobs, and are panicked about health care for themselves and their families, that we start to understand we have an obligation to touch their lives. And to do this, the first thing we need to do when we come back to this chamber is pass a stimulus package that addressed the needs of unemployed men and women. We need to restore people's faith in their economy and restore people's faith that we do care about them.

The thing that really bothers me about our failure to pass a stimulus package, is that so many people anticipated we would do so. They really did. They were counting on us, as did the financial markets. I think from a psychological point of view, we have really done a disservice to the American people, particularly at a time when we are all going home to celebrate Christmas and the holidays.

What a lousy Christmas present we are giving to the people of America. Shame on us. I hope when we come back in January that we will make it up to them. They need our help.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE HOUSE ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, when people become doctors they take the Hippocratic oath which, among other things, instructs them to "First, do no harm."

Maybe our Nation's leaders in Washington need to take a similar oath if they intend to operate on the economy.

Sadly, our friends in the Republican Party are steadfast in their insistence that we enact legislation that would harm our economy. Their plan takes more than \$200 billion out of Social Security and uses it mostly for tax breaks for wealthy individuals and profitable corporations. It will do little to stimulate the economy, and even less for the millions of newly unemployed Americans. Their plan will not make the recession better, but it will make the deficit worse. This impasse is regrettable—and it was completely avoidable.

Immediately after September 11, it became clear that the attacks dealt our economy—which already was slowing—a devastating blow. We all agreed—Democrats and Republicans, House and Senate—that America needed an economic recovery plan. And Congress had a responsibility to pass such a plan.

We asked the best financial thinkers in the country, economic leaders, such as Chairman Greenspan and Secretary Rubin: What should such a package contain?

Their advice led to the development of a set of bipartisan principles for an economic recovery plan. Those principles were endorsed by the chairmen and ranking members of the Budget Committees in both the House and the Senate.

Rather than work together to develop a plan based on those principles, Republicans in the House chose to withdraw from bipartisan negotiations and pass their own highly partisan economic plan.

The experts we consulted told us that the problem with the economy right now is that corporations have too much capacity and that consumers have too little cash. That is it in a nutshell: Corporations have too much capacity; consumers have too little cash. So we developed a plan to address those problems.

The plan we put together included tax cuts for businesses that invest and

create jobs in the near future. It had tax rebates for people who were left out of the first round and unemployment and health benefits for workers who have lost their jobs in this recession and as a result of the September 11 attacks.

Our plan did what economists say needs to be done—no more, no less. And it met the bipartisan standards agreed to by the budget leaders in both Houses.

Early this morning the House passed a far different plan. Their plan speeds up the tax cuts Congress passed last summer—months before the terrorist attacks. Their tax cuts give most of the benefits to the wealthiest individuals, and they will get those tax cuts not just next year, but the year after that, and the year after that. That is the first part of their plan.

The second part of the House Republican plan is to take the biggest corporations in America and give them billions of dollars in new tax breaks. Some profitable corporations would get permission not to pay taxes at all.

Under their plan, companies such as Enron would get hundreds of millions of taxpayer's money. Republicans are not proposing to do that for police officers, for firefighters, for postal workers. They are not proposing it for hard-pressed, hard-working families. Maybe it would help if they did, but they are not.

They are proposing it for the biggest corporations in America, with no strings attached. The corporations do not need to create a single job to get this gift. They can lay off workers and still not have to pay a dime in taxes under the Republican plan. That kind of plan does not help the economy, and it does not help workers.

Since September 11, nearly a million American workers have lost their jobs. Eight and a half million Americans are now out of work.

Often, the biggest worry when Americans lose their jobs is how to pay for their health care. The average cost of keeping health care coverage is half of the average monthly unemployment check, half of a family's total monthly income. That is why only 20 percent of workers who are eligible for COBRA coverage purchase it. Most simply cannot afford it.

The plan passed by the House provides an inadequate tax credit for individuals to buy health care, and it leaves many of them at the whim of the private insurance market.

Under their plan, health insurance will remain out of reach for millions of laid-off workers. The credit would require a parent to spend, on average, a quarter of their unemployment check for COBRA coverage. For most individuals not eligible for COBRA, the price tag would be even higher.

One million displaced workers—part-time workers and recent hires—do not

even qualify for assistance under the plan.

Survivors of victims of September 11 do not qualify for assistance under their plan. Employees, whose hours have been reduced and who have lost their health care as a result, do not qualify for their plan.

Their individual tax credit discriminates against older and sicker workers. An insurer can refuse to cover a sick worker, can charge exorbitant prices based on age and health, and can refuse to provide coverage for such basic needs as pregnancy, prescription drugs, or mental health.

All the worst practices of the insurance industry are fair game in their bill. What is worse, it would actually discourage laid-off workers from taking a new job. Under the plan passed by the House, the moment an individual goes back into the workforce, they lose their eligibility for the insurance premium tax credit.

Say a recently laid-off worker has a sick spouse; if he wants to go back to work, he can't because his new job may not offer health insurance for his wife. He would have to choose between freeing himself from unemployment and losing health care his wife needs.

That is their plan for health care. It gives workers insufficient help, and it discourages responsibility in the process.

On jobless benefits, Republicans say their plan extends jobless benefits for all laid-off workers. But it doesn't. More than half of America's laid-off workers held part-time jobs over recent hires. They paid into the unemployment system, but the House plan leaves them out.

A week ago, the whole world paused to remember the victims of September 11, but the House-passed plan forgets the economic victims of those attacks, and that is wrong.

Three days after September 11, we passed a \$15 billion airline bailout package. Democrats tried to include help for laid-off workers in that plan. We were told: Now is not the time. There will be another chance soon. We are going to consider airline security. We can help workers then.

Reluctantly, we agreed to wait. We tried to include our package of help for workers on airline security. Again, Republican colleagues filibustered. Again, they said: This is not the time. We still need to pass an economic stimulus package. We will help workers then.

We took them at their word. We included jobless and health benefits for laid-off workers in our economic recovery plan. But instead of joining us, Republicans voted to kill our proposal. They said that helping workers is not an emergency. We have waited. We have compromised.

At Republican insistence, we dropped the measures to strengthen America's homeland security from our plan, even